
STATEWIDE COORDINATION OPPORTUNITY PLAN (SCOP) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SCOP GOALS

This study had two distinct goals. The first was to assess transit need and demand in Louisiana. Urban and rural areas were examined but the focus of the study was on the transit needs in the state's rural areas. The second goal was to develop a plan for the implementation of coordination strategies on the state and local levels. The results of this project will be useful in the development of new rural public transportation services in areas not currently served and to other state agencies in need of transportation to meet their program goals through contractual agreements with existing providers.

SCOP WORK TASKS

This project was made up of a series of interdependent work efforts. The completion of each subtask was necessary for the completion of each following task. Task 1 was to prepare a comparative analysis of the findings of the needs assessment, future transit needs, and an inventory of current services and ridership. This task included the following subtasks: research and review of transit assessments from other southern states and Louisiana, review of urban transit studies in Louisiana, preparation of a needs assessment, development and implementation of a perceived needs survey, inventory of transit providers statewide, and development of service area maps. Task 2 of SCOP was to develop the Louisiana Resource Guide and Task 3 was to develop the SCOP.

THE PLAN

The underlying goal of the coordination process is *to develop the most efficient and economical way of providing transportation service to local communities*. Improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness of existing transit services in Louisiana are possible. Coordination can facilitate the needed improvements.

Effective coordination begins at the state level. Regional and local coordination is limited unless the foundation has been established by the state. Likewise, state coordination is limited unless the foundation has been established at the federal level. At present there appear to be few obstacles to coordination which can be directly attributable to federal funding agencies.

As administrators of state and federal programs, state agencies can establish and implement policy and administrative procedures needed to support coordination initiatives. If coordination is to succeed, the Inter-Agency Transportation Coordination Committee (IATCC), the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) and other state departments funding transportation services must take leadership roles.

The success achieved at the state level will have beneficial effects at the regional and local levels. Further, state level action will set the direction for coordinated efforts and opportunities which will occur at the local level.

Coordination is a process. It begins with the current situation; works to correct existing problems which were created due to the lack of coordination and prevents such problems from recurring in the future.

Defining the Vision

The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, Public Transportation Section, has, as part of a strategic planning process, established goals for attaining a statewide coordinated transportation system. Collectively, these goals portray a vision of the efficient public transportation delivery system DOTD is striving to attain. The components of the desired system envisioned by DOTD are:

Investment—a system supported by state-administered transportation funds directed into an identifiable, IATCC-coordinated and DOTD-directed transportation delivery system;

Stability—a system that has transportation as its primary mission; a system which is stable in terms of funding, vehicles and equipment and personnel; a system which will be here to meet today's needs and here tomorrow to meet future needs when they arise;

Geographic Equity—a system that provides service to people in all geographic areas in the state;

Provider and Patron Equity—a system where providers charge fairly for what they provide and patrons pay for what they get; commitment by public programs to pay for the programs' transportation expenses.

Quality—a system responsive to patrons including: riders, public program funding sources, and the public impacted by the service such as employers and service deliverers; and

Identifiable—a comprehensive system with a uniform identity comprised of urbanized and nonurbanized operators meeting all the above stated characteristics.

This vision provides a “where we want to be” scenario for a well-coordinated public transportation system. A comparison of the current situation to this ideal provides insight into opportunities available to further transportation coordination Louisiana.

Current Situation

The analysis of the data and information compiled and tabulated during the course of this effort yields several key findings which have implications for the recommended opportunities to foster coordination of publicly funded transportation services in Louisiana.

Relevant Findings from Other States

The review of studies from other states indicates that the situation in Louisiana is similar to

that encountered elsewhere. Federal funds which are distributed to all states are the fundamental transportation resource used nationwide. Some states have state-funded programs others do not. However, the issue of coordinating federal funds administered by the state at the state level appears common to the states.

The federal government has been diligent in resolving coordination obstacles at the federal level through changes in legislation and regulations. Coordination of resources at the state level is now of primary importance.

Louisiana is on the right track with coordination at the state level. The issue is being addressed in Louisiana by the Inter-Agency Transportation Coordination Committee (IATCC). The IATCC is fostering coordination of transportation resources as directed by the Governor. Under the IATCC, participating state agencies have developed a cooperative spirit, have begun to formulate a common vision and set of goals for transportation services, and, perhaps most importantly, have exhibited a willingness to make transportation work for the benefit of the state's citizens.

Current Services

Thirty agencies operate non-urbanized public transportation in Louisiana. Most of these agencies serve residents of the parishes where they operate. Twenty-five parishes do not have public transportation services.

Urbanized public transportation is provided in parts of the urbanized parishes of Rapides, East Baton Rouge, Terrebonne, Lafayette, Calcasieu, Ouachita, Orleans, St. Bernard, and Jefferson parishes. There are twelve urbanized parishes with no public transportation in the non-urbanized portions of those parishes.

There is no cooperative service between the urbanized and non-urbanized public systems at this time.

There are about 270 human service agencies that use Federally-funded operations to provide trips, but these trips are primarily provided to only an agency's own clients.

Estimated Demand for Transit Services

Demand for transit service in nonurbanized areas of Louisiana is substantial, and the unmet demand is high. Some parishes have no service at all while other parishes have service which does not meet the demand. Calculations undertaken in this study indicate that public transit providers in Louisiana's nonurbanized areas are only providing an estimated 15 percent of the projected demand.

Five of the ten rural parishes with the most unserved transit demands were served by transit systems; they are: Tangipahoa, St. Landry, Lafourche, Vernon and St. Mary. Among the top ten nonurbanized populations in terms of projected demand, five (St. Tammany, Iberia, Caddo, Calcasieu and Rapides) do not have transit service for the nonurbanized portions of the parish. The parish with the highest demand, St. Tammany, has no nonurbanized transit operator to serve the projected demand of nearly 250,000 passenger trips per year.

Of the ten parishes with the highest demands that are served by nonurbanized transit systems, those systems provide on average only 18 percent of the trips predicted by the

demand model. In addition, there are only eight parishes (Webster, Madison, St. James, Red River, Cameron, Bienville, Caldwell and Claiborne) where the existing transit system is providing more than 50 percent of the estimated demand.

Of the over 1,123,000 potential passenger trips predicted for the top five rural parish populations, more than 1,018,000 remain unserved. Of the more than 4.7 million potential passenger trips predicted for rural parishes statewide, nearly 3.9 million remain unserved. Even if the demand model were overstating the potential travel demands to some degree, it is clear that much more effort needs to be devoted to the task of meeting rural transit demands in Louisiana.

This conclusion is supported by considering the number of vehicle miles divided by the population of the service area, a simple measure of the level of transit provided. For all of the rural transit systems in the nation, the average figure is 7.07 miles per person. For the State of Louisiana, the figure is 2.94 miles per person, less than half the national average.

The demand for transit service is expected to increase. Demographic trends, particularly the aging of America, are favorable to increased demand for transit. Data provided by the Governor's Office of Elderly Affairs indicates that 15.4 percent of the population or 641,510 Louisiana residents were age 60 or older in 1990. By the year 2020, the number of people in Louisiana age 60 or older is expected to increase to 1,135,030 which will represent 23.2 percent of Louisiana's population. The number of people 85 years of age or older will more than double by the year 2020 (from 43,230 in 1990 to an estimated 93,970 in 2020).

Welfare reform programs will also contribute to increased transit demand for training and work related trips among low-wage earners who will likely be employed in the service sector which operates at expanded hours of operation.

Recent research indicates that nonurbanized public transportation systems can have substantial economic benefits on the communities within which they operate. The economic influence rendered by rural transportation appears dependent on: features of rural economies, features of the rural transit systems, and the types of trips for rural riders. Settings within which rural transportation systems expected to yield the greatest economic impact are those: 1) which provide rural commuters with access to jobs either in the rural areas or towns and cities, 2) which have a service or manufacturing economic base rather than an agricultural or natural resource base, 3) which have substantial economies of scale offered by transportation services to major activity centers such as a regional airport, medical centers or outlet malls, 4) which focus service on education, job training, or other "human investment" programs, 5) which serve expanding retirement and/or tourism communities, 6) which provide cost-effective access to public services, health services and shopping for rural, often older, people with limited transportation options, and 7) where environmental or traffic congestion costs appear to be appreciable.

Perceived Needs

A substantial majority of the transportation providers responding to a survey feel additional transportation services beyond those now available in their parish are needed. Transit operators cite insufficient resources and a growing client base as the primary reasons why additional transportation services are needed in their parishes.

Inadequate funding precludes expanding vehicle fleets and extending operating hours and days of operation to meet the demand created by people in today's society which is becoming more diverse in terms of home to work commute and work hours. Workers are no longer confined to 8 AM to 5 PM jobs. Primary job opportunities for welfare reform clients tend to be in the service and retail sectors which typically operate during non-traditional work hours.

Several providers indicated there was a need to expand days and hours of operation which in turn will require more labor and exhaust vehicles more frequently. One respondent indicated that although dialysis treatment was available for three shifts a day, transportation service could only be provided for two.

Unemployment continues as a problem in rural areas due to a lack of reliable transportation to transport people from their homes in rural areas to jobs in suburban and urban areas.

Public transit services in parishes with urbanized systems have limited coverage within the parish and most suburban and rural portions of those parishes have no service at all.

Some parishes have no public transportation. One respondent from a rural, northeast Louisiana parish indicated that there is no public transportation and no taxi service to the people in that parish.

People who rely on public transit in rural areas do so primarily because they have no other choice of transportation. They are dependent on public transit due to a condition which precludes them from owning and operating their own private transportation. They are dependent because of age (both extremes—either youth or maturity), physical or mental infirmity and/or income (includes working and non-working people).

Most providers think transit needs will grow over the next five years and that public transit will change to become more responsive to the changing needs of people in the community. The expected growth in transit demand is attributable primarily to demographic and environmental policy changes.

Demographically, the expected increase in demand will be among the elderly who constitute a primary public transit clientele. The aging of the "baby boomers" combined with increased life expectancy will contribute to a growth in the elderly population even if the overall population does not substantially increase. The elderly are a transit dependent clientele insofar as they may suffer physical and mental afflictions which preclude them from driving. Further, they will require greater medical care which translates into more medical trips.

People with low incomes will continue to rely on public transportation as will people working for low wages. Continued emphasis of reducing welfare rolls will contribute to the

need for public transit as welfare recipients who previously had fewer trip needs will need transportation to and from work and, for working parents, intervening trips for child care.

The additional transportation service opportunities exist in the form of new and expanded demand markets based on trip type caused by: trips to training and jobs both inside and outside the parish of residence, trips for medical services including Medicaid, and trips for post-secondary education program participants attending vocational schools and colleges or universities. The public system will provide transportation for all people who do not have a car or do not have access to a car or who otherwise elect to access the system.

Strengthening of environmental regulations on vehicle emission abatement, traffic congestion mitigation and constraints on low vehicle occupancy could shift motorists' attention increasingly to public transportation.

Existing Constraints

Coordination, starting at the state level, is needed to get the most from the available transportation resources. The state has to commit to building a statewide transit system. The state will need to allocate state-managed transportation resources which contribute to a long term transit system.

Inadequate funding precludes expanding vehicle fleets and extending operating hours and days of operation to meet the demand created by people in today's society which is becoming more diverse in terms of home to work commute and work hours. The system must pay decent wages to drivers and other workers and have reliable vehicles and operate during days and times of day that people need the service.

Transit providers will have to publicize their services to inform the public and make people aware that public transportation is available to everyone and not restricted to just one group or another. Public transit must become an identifiable entity of its own. Several providers indicated that the public views them as "the Council on Aging" which only provides transportation to senior citizens.

The general public and community leaders may not be aware of locally available transportation resources and services. Transit operators must take responsibility to inform and educate the public of their services.

LOUISIANA'S COORDINATION INITIATIVE

Coordination is a process through which improvements to transportation service delivery can be attained. At one extreme is the totally uncoordinated system where each publicly funded program builds and operates a transportation delivery system restricted to that program's clients. A totally coordinated transportation delivery system is one where all public programs support a comprehensive delivery system which meets the transportation needs of clients from all programs and the general public.

Louisiana's placement in the transportation coordination continuum varies within the state. Although Louisiana has yet to reach the ideal situation where all public programs support a comprehensive transportation system, considerable progress has been made at the state level and in a number of communities throughout the state.

This comprehensive plan for coordination of transportation resources in Louisiana is intended:

- 1) to capitalize on the achievements attained by the state thus far, and
- 2) to implement select opportunities designed to demonstrate approaches to meeting the unmet needs through a coordinated statewide transportation system.

Louisiana's Coordination Initiative consists of opportunities based on the study findings which indicate:

- 1) that more can be done with the state administered transportation resources presently available if there is better coordination among state agencies,
- 2) that the state's financial commitment needs to be increased to better meet the demand for transportation services, and
- 3) that select, existing situations provide opportunities for demonstrating the effectiveness of coordinating transportation service funds.

Five opportunities which have the potential for success constitute Louisiana's Coordination Initiative. Two of the five are administrative opportunities and the remaining three are situational opportunities. All of the opportunities are intended to further the development of public transportation service in Louisiana.

Administrative Opportunity

Opportunity 1—an Administrative Opportunity

Meet more of the present unmet need through better coordination of existing state administered resources.

Opportunity 1 Implementation

The Inter-Agency Transportation Coordination Committee (IATCC) is the state-level administrative mechanism to implement transportation coordination in

Louisiana. The IATCC is a committee established by Executive Order of the Governor whose membership includes the chief executives of state agencies administering most of the transportation funds in the state budget and the leaders of both houses of the legislature.

Substantial U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, funds are allocated directly to the larger urbanized transit systems in Louisiana. The urbanized transit providers serve both a key role in the provision of public transportation and as the foundation for expanding service into presently unserved, adjacent non-urbanized areas. Based on these considerations, it is recommended that the membership of the IATCC be expanded to include the President of the Louisiana Public Transit Association (LPTA).

Implementing coordination of transportation in Louisiana will require substantial effort. It will require the departments represented on the IATCC to collectively reassess services they are currently funding. The coordination effort should ensure that current level of services are maintained and seek ways to expand services both within areas currently being served and into areas where service is currently not available.

As a first step in the effort to further coordinate state managed public funds for transportation, the IATCC should review current transportation service agreements and state administered funding of transportation service vehicles on a parish by parish or other service area basis. The purpose of the review is to assess the degree to which coordination has been achieved through past actions, to assess the state agencies' potential for better coordination of resources in the future and to estimate the level of unmet need expected to be satisfied through better coordination. The number of state agency operating and capital agreements within an area and the number of providers involved in those agreements should be documented. Ratios of agreements to providers which are one to one or approach one to one are likely indicative of an area with high coordination potential.

The potential for better coordination and for meeting unmet needs should be established in IATCC-developed coordination plans on a parish by parish or service area basis. These plans will be particularly important in those parishes and service areas where the various state departments have already established program-specific providers or providers who otherwise restrict services to particular client groups or particular places or both. The plans will document the existing situation in each parish or service area and approaches to get the transportation delivery system in line with current coordination objectives. Since many of the parties involved in situations needing coordination are likely bound by contractual arrangements, a schedule specifying the time needed to meet contractual obligations should be included in each plan. During this coordination transition period, the participating state agencies can resolve existing problems and work to ensure such problems do not recur. The agencies represented on the IATCC should agree to bring any plans for renewal of transportation services or new transportation services before the IATCC for approval.

Opportunity 2—an Administrative Opportunity

Establish state administered funding to support start-up of expanded or transitional transportation services.

Opportunity 2 Implementation

A strong financial commitment will be needed at the state level to expand public transit services and to support transitional efforts among existing systems. Louisiana can meet this need for start-up and transitional funding by increasing the state's public transportation commitment and/or by appropriating revenue from other state sources.

As a start, state agencies should set aside a portion of any new or additional transportation funds for start-up and transitional efforts. This is particularly relevant to DOTD which should consider setting aside increased public transportation funding derived from the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). This would provide existing operations with a stable level of funding and apply new, additional funds to support expanded or transitional operations. The changes in funding procedures should be reflected in the DOTD's state management plans for FTA administered programs.

Little can be expected in the way of meeting unmet transportation demand and need if expanded services are financed at the expense of existing services. State agencies must continue to maintain existing levels of service at the same time start-up and transitional funding will be needed for expanded and better coordinated services.

The initiation of transportation coordination efforts in areas presently served by multiple transportation providers will likely require transitional funding. These funds will be necessary to maintain an appropriate level of fiscal support for existing providers involved with coordination transitions and to finance capital and operational expenses of expanded services by either existing providers or new providers.

Increased state support for nonurbanized areas could come from a change in the amount and distribution of funds allocated for public transportation. The state currently commits \$6,000,000 annually for public transportation support. Of that amount, approximately \$150,000 is allotted to nonurbanized transportation and the remainder distributed among the urbanized systems. Increasing the appropriation such that the amount available to urbanized areas is maintained or increased and a proportional amount is made available to nonurbanized areas would resolve the current geographic inequity of funding between urbanized and nonurbanized areas.

Data from the 1990 U.S. Census indicate that slightly more than half (53%) of Louisiana's population resided within an urbanized area and 47% resided in nonurbanized areas. The state could apply these proportions as a means of providing an equitable level of funding for both urbanized and nonurbanized transit systems. If these proportions were used as the basis for allotting state public transportation funds, the current \$6,000,000 annual appropriation would need to be increased to approximately \$11,037,735 in order to maintain the amount presently

allotted to urbanized areas and to provide a proportionally equitable amount for Louisiana's population in nonurbanized areas. Under the \$11,037,735 appropriation scenario, urbanized areas would continue to receive \$5,850,000 and the remaining \$5,187,735 would be allotted to nonurbanized areas.

Alternative sources of state funds to provide additional support for public transportation should be investigated. A 1998 study by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) indicates that most states provide direct financial assistance for public transportation. That state financial assistance is derived from a variety of sources including the general fund, transportation fund, sales tax, fuel tax and lottery proceeds. Florida applies a portion of the motor vehicle license tax as a means of funding public transportation. Some states have developed unique funding mechanisms such as Pennsylvania which dedicates state lottery profits to elderly transportation and New Jersey which applies a portion of casino profits to public transportation.

Situational Opportunities

Three situational opportunity scenarios are present in Louisiana as possible coordination implementation subjects for the IATCC; they are:

- 1) build systemic linkages between urbanized transit systems and adjacent nonurbanized areas,
- 2) expand service into nonurbanized areas with relatively high unmet demand and few existing public transportation service providers, and
- 3) implement a comprehensive, parishwide, coordinated public transportation system in those areas which have strong local initiatives.

The research conducted in this study indicates that differential levels of publicly funded transportation services exist geographically within the state and within parishes. The approach to transportation coordination will likewise vary as appropriate to the existing situation as it applies to the status of state and local transportation coordination accomplishments and the availability of existing transportation service delivery resources deployed in a given area.

The following criteria were used to select the situational opportunities presented:

- 1) the opportunity would substantially contribute to the goal of meeting unmet needs;
- 2) the opportunity is geographically representative of similar situations which presently exist in Louisiana; and
- 3) the opportunity has a high likelihood of success.

The three opportunities presented are intended to address:

- 1) geographic inequities in service,
- 2) urbanized and adjoining nonurbanized area linkages, and
- 3) furtherance of coordination in areas driven by a strong local initiative.

Each of these three situational opportunities is both a pilot in that it has never been accomplished in Louisiana and a demonstration in that others will learn from the implementation experience.

The success of each opportunity is dependent on technical assistance and financial assistance and commitment from the state. Each scenario involves a start-up effort. A commitment to support the projects for a period of three years should be made. This amount of time will be needed to measure and assess progress and achievement.

Although the situational opportunities presented vary geographically, the implementation of each opportunity follows a consistent sequence of steps. The following steps apply to each situational opportunity presented.

Step 1. Establish local leadership to oversee and direct the effort.

The IATCC serves as the entity through which state administered transportation program funds are coordinated at the state level. A comparable entity, a local transportation coordination committee, is needed at the local level where publicly funded transportation services operate.

Local leadership is needed regardless of the geographic scope of an effort. The leader may evolve through a local initiative where a prospective transportation provider, political leaders, business leaders or a group of concerned citizens from a municipality or parish approach the state requesting assistance. The IATCC can encourage the development of local leadership by informing local governments and transportation providers of demand estimates and state funding coordination initiatives.

As the lead agency for the IATCC, the Louisiana DOTD should contact parish governments and publicly funded transportation providers annually. The communiqué should provide information regarding existing transportation demand in the parish and existing transportation providers being supported with state administered funds. The recipients of the correspondence from DOTD should also be informed of the need to establish a local transportation coordination committee, the IATCC oversight of state administered funds for transportation services, the need to have a parish or multi-parish coordination implementation plan, and IATCC procedures regarding the eligibility for receiving state administered transportation funds.

The parish governments and transportation providers should be encouraged to form and become part of a local transportation coordination committee as the way to initiate the process of identifying community transportation needs. In addition to representation from the parish government and transportation providers, the committee should include community leaders, representatives from agencies which serve clients in need of transportation, representatives from prospective user groups, local elected officials, and members of the business community. DOTD should support these local efforts through Federal Transit Administration funding for such projects.

Step 2. Prepare a local transportation coordination implementation plan.

A transportation coordination implementation plan should be prepared for each parish or multi-parish service area. Some states such as North Carolina require such plans as a condition for receiving public transportation funding. Each implementation plan would address:

- existing transportation services,
- transportation service needs and demand,
- public funds (amounts by source) being expended on transportation services,
- cost and magnitude of service provided by publicly funded providers,
- coordination achievements,
- how available resources can be better coordinated,
- alternative approaches to meet the existing transportation service demand, and
- proposed budget and alternative means of financing.

Any proposed expanded service, either expansion into an area not presently being served or expansion of service within an area being served, should be required to have an implementation plan. The plans should be developed with oversight and input from the local transportation coordination committee. They would assist in the assessment of local transportation needs and provide recommendations for implementing a coordinated transportation service. The plans should also be presented to the IATCC for review and determination of consistency with IATCC coordination initiatives.

Planning funds administered by state agencies, particularly those represented on the IATCC, should be used to support these planning efforts.

Step 3. Implement the improved or expanded service.

DOTD, with IATCC oversight, should provide the technical assistance and support for implementing transportation coordination plans. Working closely with the local transportation coordination committee and the participating transportation provider or providers, DOTD should fund vehicles and operations and provide assistance in support of personnel training, equipment acquisition, marketing, program administration and monitoring and evaluation.

Opportunity 3—a Situational Opportunity

Build systemic linkages between urbanized transit systems and adjacent non-urbanized areas.

Opportunity 3 Implementation

Few of the parishes where urbanized places are located have public transportation providers serving the nonurbanized populations of those parishes. At present, there are twelve urbanized parishes (Caddo, Calcasieu, East Baton Rouge, Jefferson, Lafayette, Plaquemines, Rapides, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. Tammany, Terrebonne and West Baton Rouge) with no public transportation in the non-urbanized portion of the parish.

Urbanized and nonurbanized transit systems were established independent of each other and have continued to operate independent of each other. Several opportunities are available to build a transportation delivery system serving both the needs of an urbanized area and the adjacent nonurbanized areas. Although two specific areas have been singled out for discussion, all urbanized areas of the state hold the potential for meaningful urbanized-nonurbanized transit linkages and should be given consideration when implementing this opportunity.

Although opportunities for establishing the desired urbanized-nonurbanized linkages may be present in other geographic areas, the situation for Houma (Terrebonne Parish) and Slidell (St. Tammany Parish) stand out as having few inherent obstacles. Two of these areas (Houma and Slidell) are relatively new in having achieved the requisite population necessary to be designated an urbanized place. Public transit service has been initiated in the Houma urbanized area but not in the Slidell community. Although having a sizable nonurbanized population in the remaining portions of the parishes within which these urbanized areas are located, neither parish has a nonurbanized provider.

As the first step to move forward on this opportunity, DOTD acting on behalf of the IATCC should contact the urbanized transit agencies and metropolitan planning organizations to determine the receptivity to establishing a linked service covering both the urbanized and nonurbanized portions of a parish or set of parishes. In those areas which are receptive to establishing a linked service, DOTD and the respective metropolitan planning organization and/or public transportation provider should prepare an implementation plan which identifies the availability of FTA funding and other state and local funding which could be used to support the prospective linked system.

Opportunity 4—a Situational Opportunity

Expand service and start new service in nonurbanized areas with relatively high unmet demand and few existing public transportation service providers.

Opportunity 4 Implementation

The parishes comprising the northeastern region of Louisiana exemplify this situation. Collectively, the parishes of northeast Louisiana have higher than average transportation need characteristics and extremely limited rural public transportation service.

Only two and one-half of the seven parishes comprising the northeast region of Louisiana have rural public transportation service. Public transportation in northeast Louisiana is available in portions of the City of Monroe, the western rural portion of Ouachita Parish, and Caldwell and Madison Parishes. No public transportation service is available to the citizens of East Carroll, Franklin, Jackson, Morehouse, Richland, Tensas, Union and West Carroll Parishes and the eastern rural portion of Ouachita Parish.

Three factors contribute to nonurbanized parishes not having a public transportation provider, they are: 1) the absence of a locally driven initiative, 2) the lack of local matching funds to leverage federal transportation program funds, and 3) the lack of state funds to get programs started and keep them going.

Leadership to establish service where there is none now is needed for this opportunity to even get off the ground. That leadership could come from a state entity, a local entity or an existing provider with an interest in expanding service into presently unserved areas. That existing provider may or may not presently be a public transit provider. The existing provider may be providing a programmatic service under contract to a state social service agency. The IATCC should review the existing providers under contract within the northeast Louisiana area and identify those providers who in the judgment of the members of the IATCC have the potential to operate an expanded service to the general public.

The IATCC, through the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, should contact elected officials and community leaders in northeast Louisiana and pose the concept of developing a comprehensive region-wide public transportation system. The local interested parties should organize a transportation coordination committee and continue working with the IATCC on the formulation of an implementation plan which would address the issue of start-up funding to finance the capital resources and operations of the expansion of service.

Opportunity 5—a Situational Opportunity

Implement a comprehensive, parishwide, coordinated public transportation system in those areas which have strong local initiatives.

Opportunity 5 Implementation

This opportunity is specifically directed to a parish with a strong local initiative to better coordinate existing transportation services. Although the local initiative criteria may be present in other parishes, Tangipahoa Parish is known to be one such area where local initiative has for several years actively sought to better coordinate transportation resources as a means of providing better transportation service to the citizens within the parish. The Tangipahoa experiences and situation are discussed as being representative of the prerequisite elements for this opportunity.

The initiative toward an improvement of transportation for all parish citizens began through the Tangipahoa Quality of Life Coalition (originally named the Hammond Quality of Life Coalition). The local group approached the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development for technical assistance. DOTD responded and financed the completion of a needs assessment and an operational assessment of publicly funded transit providers within the parish. The Tangipahoa Transportation Council, formed after the completion of the needs assessment, has continued to pursue implementation of a comprehensive, coordinated public transit system.

Consistent with the recommendations presented in the operational assessment study, two publicly funded providers, the Tangipahoa Voluntary Council on Aging and Transcare, Inc., have collaborated on an implementation plan. The implementation plan calls for the establishment of a new, deviated-fixed-route, intraparish service with feeder routes. Each of the participating providers would continue to meet their obligations specified in their respective contractual agreements involving funds managed by a state agency. With two studies already complete and a consensus of agreement among the respective parties as to what needs to be done, implementation of the plan is the next step.

Due to the existing contractual agreements and operations, some level of service duplication is expected to be encountered during the first year of the new service. During this transitional year when improved coordination linkages are being forged, certain operational components of the existing system which are necessary to meet existing contractual obligations will continue but ultimately they should be absorbed into the coordinated system as service provision and billing arrangements are resolved.

The establishment of the new deviated-fixed-route service will require start-up funding for vehicles and operations. An estimate of the cost for such a service was identified in the operational assessment report. The total cost of the proposed new service will be determined by the unit cost to operate and by the magnitude of the service (number of vehicles in service, hours per day and days per week of service).

If the opportunity proves successful, linked service with adjacent parishes is a possibility. Coordination among existing providers in Tangipahoa and Washington Parishes and the development of a comprehensive transit system serving the urbanized and nonurbanized areas of neighboring St. Tammany Parish could ultimately lead to a multi-parish, north-shore system serving the citizens of all three parishes.

SUMMARY

Louisiana's Coordination Initiative is based on this study's findings which indicate that:

- 1) more transportation service is possible using available state administered transportation resources if there is better coordination among state agencies,
- 2) the state's financial commitment needs to be increased to meet the unmet demand for transportation services by funding system transitions and expansions, and
- 3) select, existing situations provide opportunities for demonstrating the effectiveness of coordinating public funds for transportation service.

The opportunities proposed capitalize on Louisiana's transportation coordination achievements and provide for meeting more of the unmet demand through the implementation of two administrative and three situational opportunities which include:

- 1) meet more of the present unmet need through better coordination of existing state administered resources,
- 2) establish state administered funding to support start-up of expanded or transitional transportation services,
- 3) build systemic linkages between urbanized transit systems and adjacent non-urbanized areas,
- 4) expand service and start new service in nonurbanized areas with relatively high unmet demand and few existing public transportation service providers, and
- 5) implement a comprehensive, parishwide, coordinated public transportation system in those areas which have strong local initiatives.

The first two opportunities, which are administrative in character, will be undertaken by the Inter-Agency Transportation Coordination Committee. The departments represented on the IATCC will reassess services they are currently funding and devise approaches to better coordinate publicly funded transportation delivery systems.

The last three opportunities involve specific projects representative of situations present throughout Louisiana. Each is intended to demonstrate how current situations can be enhanced to better meet the transportation needs of Louisiana's citizens.